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ABSTRACT

A survey of 14 leading language arts, children's literature, and reading methods books, as well as professional journal articles and other notable books on reading to children, yielded a total of eight recommendations made by more than half of the authors, including the following: (1) prepare by previewing the book, (2) read with expression, (3) observe and encourage children's responses, and (4) allow time for discussion after reading. However, recent observations of kindergarten teachers reading to their students suggest that these recommendations do not say enough to teachers and teacher educators about the "how" of storybook reading. Observations and transcripts of two kindergarten teachers reading aloud the same book were analyzed in light of the eight recommendations for effective storybook reading. The results did not distinguish between the two teachers. A deeper analysis of the teacher talk, however, indicated differences as well as similarities between the two readings. The amount of talk by teacher B was greater than that of teacher M overall, as well as before and during the reading, but not in the discussion after the reading. Teacher B focused much more upon asking inferential questions than did teacher M, who focused twice on the episode which contained the theme of the story, while teacher B's focus was broader, giving attention to many aspects of the story. While teacher M's talk concentrated mainly on the moral of the story, teacher B can better be characterized as focusing on thinking skills. (HTH)

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Teachers Reading to Their Students: Different Styles Different Effects?

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In 1908, E.B. Huey wrote a remarkable book about reading entitled The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading. In Chapter XVI, entitled "Learning to Read at Home", Huey discussed how young children come to learn to read. He stated, "The secret of it all lies in the parents' reading aloud to and with the child" (p. 332). Examining the content of the language arts and reading methods books and child development books written for parents during the past eight decades, one cannot help but feel that Huey was absolutely right. Virtually every methods text places storybook reading number one on its list of suggestions for fostering positive reading attitudes and skills in young children. Research shows significant correlations between being read to and vocabulary development (e.g., Burroughs, 1972), early reading (e.g., Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966) and success with beginning reading in school (e.g., Wells, 1982, 1985). And, according to Becoming a Nation of Readers, the recent Report of the Commission on Reading, "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 23). Thus, there is overwhelming evidence that reading to young children is good for them and that preschool and primary teachers should read to the children in their classes on a regular basis.

In recent years research interest in storybook reading has reached an all-time high. Attempting to learn more about the activity, researchers have sought to go beyond the evidence that storybook reading is beneficial to the more intriguing question of why it has such powerful effects on young children's literacy development. These investigations have led to a number of careful studies of what actually goes on during storybook readings in homes and in classrooms. A major insight resulting from the studies is that reading to children is not simply a matter of verbalizing, or even reading dramatically, the text printed on the page. Rather, there is considerable language and social interaction surrounding the words and events of the text itself. Thus, it is what happens "around" the text, plus the text itself, that constitute a story reading. In fact, several researchers present the case that it is actually the language and social interaction surrounding the text that make literacy "take" in the child (Cochran-Smith, 1984; Heath, 1982; Teale, 1984). In other words, the adult's mediating of the text (the conversation that surrounds the author's words) is extremely significant.

Investigations have also revealed that there is more than one way in which parents mediate texts when they read to their children (Heath, 1982; Ninio, 1980; Teale, 1984b). Furthermore, Heath (1982) and Ninio (1980) showed that the variation in language and social interactional characteristics of storybook reading actually affected the emergent literacy abilities and conceptions of the children being read to.

For any teaching activity as important as this, then, one would expect to find many "how to" suggestions for teachers in methods books. Therefore, we surveyed fourteen leading language arts, children's literature, and reading methods books, as well as professional journal articles and other notable books on reading to children like Jim Trelease's The Read-Aloud Handbook to see how experts suggest the teacher mediates the text for his or her students. This survey yielded a total of eight recommendations made by more than half of the authors. Repeatedly it was recommended that teachers:

(1) ***Choose books carefully.*** (Use books that make a 'good read', i.e., that have vivid characterization, fast-paced plot, good dialogue. Also, select books based on the interest level, attention span, and other characteristics of the students in the class.)

(2) ***Prepare by previewing the book.*** (Know the story and how to pace the read, what sections to elaborate on.)

(3) ***Provide the appropriate physical setting.*** (Make sure children are comfortable, can see book, and so forth.)

(4) ***Let the children settle into a story listening frame.*** (Set the right mood; do not develop story reading time in an authoritarian way.)

(5) ***Provide a brief introduction.*** (Stimulate student involvement and set purposes for reading.)

(6) ***Read with expression.*** (There was more elaboration on this recommendation than on any other. Among the suggestions: recreate the story mood with the appropriate pitch, tone of voice; adjust reading pace to fit the story; don't read too fast; enjoy sharing and demonstrate that enjoyment.

(7) ***Observe and encourage children's responses.*** (Watch students' facial expressions; encourage spontaneous sharing and student questions.)

(8) ***Allow time for discussion after reading.*** (Let the "thoughts, fears, hopes, and discoveries" of the students surface; help the children to deal with these ideas and feelings.)

It might be assumed, then, that these recommendations represent the ways in which teachers are encouraged to mediate the texts of storybooks for their students. By following these guidelines, a teacher could be said to be reading effectively to students.

But do these recommendations say enough to teachers and teacher educators about the how of storybook reading? Our recent observations of kindergarten teachers reading to their students suggest not. There appear to be other important factors that make differences in the nature of the storybook reading experiences, differences that may well prove to have significant effects on young children's literacy development.

Storybook Reading in a Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Program

Over the past two years we have worked in conjunction with one San Antonio area school district to implement a Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Program, a program intended to provide a developmentally appropriate reading-writing curriculum for kindergartners. A core activity of the program is, not surprisingly, storybook readings. The readings lead to a wide range of follow-up activities, from the children's independent re-readings in the classroom library to art, writing, and creative dramatics.

As teachers read to their children, we were struck by what seemed to be differences in the purposes for, and means of conducting, group storybook readings. These observations prompted an exploratory study that asked, "Are there actually identifiably different storybook reading styles?"

Two teachers' readings. To begin to answer this question two teachers, Ms. Murchison and Ms. Baxter, were asked to read the same book, Strega Nona, to their kindergartners. Both Ms. Murchison and Ms. Baxter were experienced kindergarten teachers and were regarded as good teachers by their district and the authors. The readings were audiotaped and observed by the authors. Subsequently the tapes were transcribed so that an analysis could be conducted.

As a first step in analysis we examined each teacher's reading in light of the 8 recommendations for effective storybook reading discussed earlier. The results were interesting because they failed to distinguish at all between Murchison and Baxter. Because the book was chosen for the teachers, we shall skip discussion of recommendation 1, "Choose books carefully," except to say that Strega Nona is a piece of quality children's literature that appears to meet all of the criteria for a 'good read.'

(2) *Prepare by previewing the book.* Both teachers previewed the book extensively (as, we suspect, would any teacher who knew she would be observed, audio-taped, and analyzed by two university researchers).

(3) *Provide appropriate physical setting.* Both teachers did this.

(4) *Let children settle into story frame.* In each case the teacher had an established positive storybook reading environment that the children immediately settled into for the reading of Strega Nona.

(5) *Provide brief introduction.* Both teachers provided introductions, Ms. Murchison's being brief (1/2 minute) and Ms. Baxter's being more extensive (2 minutes). Each teacher did stimulate student involvement, but neither actually set purposes (or had students set purposes) for the reading.

(6) *Read with expression.* Both teachers conducted the reading in an engaging, spirited manner.

(7) *Observe/encourage responses.* There was considerable response from the children in each class.

(8) *Allow for discussion after reading.* Both teachers elicited discussion after the reading.

According to the guidelines contained in the various 'methods' texts in the field, then, there is little difference between the readings of the two teachers. Each generally fulfills the eight recommendations, suggesting that the readings were similar.

A deeper analysis, however, indicates interesting differences, as well as similarities between Murchison's and Baxter's readings. The actual language of the readings had to be examined; therefore, each utterance of the teacher or the students (other than the actual text of the story) was analyzed for its form (question, response, comment), the strategy it embodied (focusing, confirming, extending, clarifying, etc.), the type of information it centered upon (literal, inferential, background, predictive, etc.) and the aspect of the story it focused upon (e.g., setting, theme, or the initiating event, attempt, reaction, consequence, or interval response of an episode). This procedure helped provide a detailed description of what was actually discussed in each of the readings, as well as how the discussion evolved. In this article, detailed descriptions of only the teacher talk in each reading are provided because our purpose is to address the issue of teacher storybook reading style.

Results

A comparison of the total number of utterances (questions, statements, responses) by each teacher during each of the readings reveals differences at a very global level. Table 1 shows that the amount of talk by Baxter (B) was greater than that of Murchison (M) overall, as well as Before and During the reading of the story itself but not in the discussion After the story reading. This approximately three-fold difference in teacher talk suggested the possibility of important qualitative differences between what went on in the two readings.

Insert Table 1 Here

Further analyses showed that there were indeed qualitative differences between the readings. Baxter, for instance, focused much more upon details from setting information in her reading than did Murchison [122 (34%) of B's utterances; 22 (20%) of M's]. Excerpt 1 from B's reading is typical of the 17 different occasions upon which she engaged the children in discussion about setting information.

Insert Baxter Excerpt 1 Here

Note that this discussion (which occurs after reading the first sentence in the story) focused the children's attention upon many details about Strega Nona and also are 5 of the children a chance to voice their opinions. As was found in other excerpts from B's manuscripts, this attention to detail and the attempt to elicit contributions from a range of children were characteristic of her reading. In contrast, M's only extended discussion of setting information occurred when she had the children recall, just after having read about them, all the different jobs Big Anthony had to perform for Strega Nona.

Another difference between the two readings showed up in B's much heavier emphasis upon discussing Episode 1 (in which Big Anthony sees Strega Nona make the magic pasta pot cook, and he tells the townspeople about it) and Episode 2 (in which the townspeople laugh at Big Anthony and he vows to make the pot cook). B, asking 22 questions and making 12 responses and 5 statements, engaged children in a discussion of (a) how they could tell (from looking at the illustration) the pasta was cooking after Strega Nona worked her magic, (b) what pasta is and, how their families make pasta, (c) the reasoning behind the townspeople's response to Big Anthony's announcement, and (d) the nature of Big Anthony's subsequent reaction to their response. M, on the other hand, asked children if they thought the pot would actually do any thing after Strega Nona sang the magic song and if they would have (a) laughed at Big Anthony and (b) believed him. M read Episode 2 with *no* accompanying discussion.

There were also similarities between the readings. During the actual reading of the text B stopped 41 times for discussion and M 22 times. On 15 of these occasions both B and M stopped at identical points in the text. For 8 of these 15 stops the teachers focused on the same issues. For example, after reading the word *grazia*, both B and M clarified its meaning; and after reading to the point where Strega Nona is leaving town and Big Anthony thinks, "My chance has come!", both teachers had the children predict what Big Anthony would do. In fact, predicting, was frequently requested by each teacher. B stopped at 11 points in the reading to have students predict what they thought would happen; M, at 7.

Overall, however, the differences between the readings were more marked than the similarities. The key differences between them are perhaps best illustrated in the following two excerpts from each teacher. Twice in her reading Murchison focused the discussion on Episode 7 of the story, the point at which Strega Nona declared that Big Anthony's punishment should fit his crime and made him clean up all the pasta by eating it. In essence, Episode 7 contained the theme of the story. Note the discussions surrounding this issue:

Insert Murchison Exceprts 1 and 2 Here

Murchison's talk centered on Episode 7 more than on any other single aspect of the story, and her focus in these discussions focused children on considering the appropriateness of the 'moral.' M's concentration on the theme of the story led to a characterization of her as the Literary Reader. Her concern throughout appeared to center on having the children follow the major thematic "point" of the story.

Baxter's reading, on the other hand, was more widespread in focus. Many aspects received considerable attention in B's reading: Strega Nona as a character, setting information about Big Anthony's jobs, a man with a headache who comes to Strega Nona for a cure, Episodes 1, 2, 3, and 7, and the significance of the word tale.

Across all of these topics, however, was a consistency of style in B's reading. She asked a great number of inferential questions: 93 of her 169 questions focused on inferences. Especially striking was her tendency to lead the children through series of questions aimed at supporting inferences with textually explicit information, as the following excerpts show:

Insert Baxter Excerpts 2 and 3 Here

Notice that in Excerpt 2, B first asked a question requiring a predictive inference, then followed up by focusing the children on textually explicit information that could answer her next two inferential questions, and finally ended with a series of three utterances that used textually explicit information to clarify why Big Anthony didn't blow the three kisses. B's language in Excerpt 3 also led the children to use textually explicit information (in this case from an illustration) to derive an answer for her inferential question, "How does he feel?" Series of questions such as these aimed at leading the children through the steps necessary to answer to inferential understandings were typical of B's reading.

Whereas M's talk concentrated mainly on the moral of the story, B can better be characterized as focusing on Thinking Skills. Analysis of her talk showed less concern for maintaining continuity of the overall story line but great attention to logical thinking. For Baxter the content of the particular story appeared to become secondary to the emphasis on fostering thinking skills.

The teachers analyze themselves. As an extension of the analysis of teacher talk, both Murchison and Baxter were asked to explain why they read books to their students. Their answers fit the characterizations of them as Literary Reader (Murchison) and Thinking Skills Reader (Baxter) to a surprising degree. The primary reason each teacher gave for reading to children was to foster enjoyment of reading. Beyond this reason their responses diverged in interesting ways. The following chart summarizes key remarks of each, in terms of her priorities for reading:

Insert Table 2 Here

These teachers certainly seemed to know precisely what they were doing when they read to their children.

Conclusions

These analyses suggest that there are identifiably different storybook reading styles that teachers may have. Although there were numerous similarities between the readings, the differences were considerable. It remains now to conduct additional research to see if the styles that have been described here, the Literary Reader and the Thinking Skills Reader, hold up across readings of a number of storybooks for Murchison and Baxter. Preliminary analyses suggest they will.

Such findings have significant implications for future research, for classroom practice, and for teacher education. Additional studies should be conducted to determine how much variety there is in teachers' story reading styles. The results of this research imply that it is important for teachers to realize what they are doing when they read to children. Because a story reading consists of not merely the text but also the language and social interaction surrounding the text, it is critical for teachers to consider the nature of that language and social interaction. It may well be that the way in which a teacher reads a book will directly affect the children's understanding of, and response to, the story.

By no means is it suggested that one style is good and another bad, but it can certainly be seen that styles are different. Teachers may wish to consider carefully what objectives they believe storybook reading accomplishes in their curriculum and then adapt their reading style accordingly. Or, it may be that a teacher will wish to develop a repertoire of different styles and employ them to accomplish different objectives or for purposes of reading different types of literature.

This notion of a repertoire of teacher reading styles also has implications for teacher training. Teachers are told that they <u>should</u> read to children but often they actually receive little instruction in <u>how</u> to read to children. The analysis of leading reading and children's literature methods books referred to earlier revealed that suggestions for how to read aloud are actually quite general. More specific information on teacher reading styles and the importance of the language and social interactional patterns of storybook reading should be a part of every elementary teacher's education.

Reading to children is too important an activity to be left to chance. It needs to be a planned part of the curriculum. As the research reported here suggests, a great deal more needs to be learned about story reading so that it will be as pleasurable and effective a literacy learning experience as possible.

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Table 1.

Global Characteristics of Teacher Talk: Number of Utterances

Phase of Reading	Murchison Q*	S*	R*	Total	Baxter Q*	S*	R*	Total
Before	1	7	-	8	11	13	17	41
During	39	13	33	85	156	51	97	304
After	10	=	7	17	2	4	4	10
Total	50	20	40	110	169	68	118	355

*Q = Questions; S = Statements; R = Responses

Baxter: **O.k., if Strega Nona means Grandma Witch, what does that tell you about this old lady?**

Student: She's a witch.

B: **It tells you that she's a witch. And what else?**

(pause but no student response)

B: **What else? Brian.**

Brian: It tells you that she may be being nice to the other people but not nice to the other people.

B: **O.k. Who do... What makes you think that she's a nice witch, Brian?**

Brian: Because she's giving things to the people.

B: **You can see that in the picture, can't you? What does her name, Grandma Witch, tell you about her? Phillip.**

Phillip: She's a grandma.

B: **So about how old do you think she is then?**

Phillip: Really old, about 64.

B: **O.k. It tells you she's older. And a witch is someone who what? What is a witch?**

Student: Mean.

B: **O.k. She could be mean. What else? Joel.**

Joel: She might could be rude.

B: **She might be rude. Any other ideas? Brian.**

Brian: They eat bat stew.

B: **O.k., she might be someone who eats bat stew. Let's see if any of those things are true about her in the story.**

Excerpt 1. Baxter's Reading of *Strega Nona*.

Baxter: **Do you think it's going to stop now?**

Student: No.

S: No.

B: **Why not?**

S: Because he didn't throw kisses.

B: **Why doesn't he give it the three kisses?**

S: Because he doesn't remember.

B: **He didn't pay attention. Do you remember at the beginning of the book they said Big Anthony is someone who doesn't pay attention? And he didn't notice that she did that.**

Excerpt 2. Baxter's Reading of *Strega Nona*.

Teacher reads text: *"So start eating."*

Student: (groans)

S: I knew that.

Baxter: How does he feel? Look at his face. He's what?

S: Fat.

B: He's fat. And what else? Look at his face.

S: He's tired.

B: He looks like he's tired. Jason.

S: There's so much more he'll maybe blow up.

B: You think he's going to blow up. Because there is a lot left, isn't there?

Excerpt 3. Baxter's Reading of *Strega Nona*.

Murchison: Well, do you think he should be punished? Did he do something wrong?

Students: Yeah.

M: If you do something wrong, should you be punished for it?

Ss: Yes.

M: Shouldn't Big Anthony be punished?

Ss: No.

M: What kind of punishment should Big Anthony have? Should they really string him up?

Ss: No.

M: What should they do? Get mad at him?

Ss: They should get mad...

M: I think they're already mad. What should they do next?

S: Put him in jail.

M: Good, put him in jail. What else could they do? Could they spank him?

Ss: No. [laughs]

S: They could send him to his own house.

M: Yeah.

S: Move him away.

M: Move him away. Send him out of town, never come back to our town, huh? Well, Strega Nona's a very smart lady. Let's see what she decided to do.

Excerpt 1. Murchison's reading of Strega Nona.

[Story reading has just finished.]

Murchison: Did you all like that? What would you have done to Big Anthony?

Student: Put him in jail.

M: You would have?

S: Spanked him.

M: You would have spanked him?

S: Made him eat it all up.

S: I would make him..., send him to another town.

M: Yeah, I think that was a pretty good idea though. Since he made the mess, he had to clean it up, right?

Excerpt 2. Murchison's reading of Strega Nona.